



Republic of **Mauritius**

**BANQUET IN HONOUR OF HER EXCELLENCY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA**

**INTERCONTINENTAL MAURITIUS RESORT
BALACLAVA**

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SPEECH

BY

**DR THE HON NAVINCHANDRA RAMGOOLAM, GCSK, FRCP
PRIME MINISTER**

Your Excellency, Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil, President of the Republic of India,
Distinguished Guests,

On behalf of the Government and people of Mauritius and in my personal name and that of my wife, Veena, I wish to extend a very warm welcome to you Excellency and your spouse, Dr Devisingh Ramsingh Shekhawat and to the distinguished members of your delegation.

Your Excellency, we are greatly honoured by your visit to Mauritius. Indeed, your life and career have been and remain a succession of achievements whether as a spirited lawyer, a social worker defending the down-trodden or as an unstoppable politician.

Your assumption of Office as the First woman President of India in 2007 was a historical moment not only for India but equally for those who, across the world, are committed to the upliftment of women.

You were also the first woman to hold the post of Governor of Rajasthan. Following your first election for the Jalgaon Assembly Constituency at the young age of 27, you have never looked back. From the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly to the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, you hold the singular distinction of having never lost a single election you contested. We are indeed privileged, Excellency, to have someone of your stature in our midst.

Your visit, Excellency, highlights the special bonds of friendship between India and Mauritius and marks yet another milestone in the close cooperation between our two nations. Diplomatic ties were established in 1948. However our peoples know each other since the early years of the nineteenth century when our ancestors left their Mother India to make Mauritius their home away from home. Over the decades, the relations have encompassed every field of human endeavour.

Excellency,

- The relations between India and Mauritius are not fair-weather relations !
- These are relations founded on a bedrock of values and principles !
- These are relations that transcend time, people and State duties !

The robust bonds between Mauritius and India find anchorage in the struggle of Mahatma Gandhi for the freedom of nations whether in India, South Africa or Mauritius. It draws from the common values we espouse as independent nations, values of secularism, democracy and equal opportunities for our peoples. Social justice, inclusiveness and citizen empowerment ride high in our process of nation building.

Mahatma Gandhi conveyed a powerful message to the colonial masters and the inhabitants of Mauritius when he paid us a visit in 1901. He reckoned that the pent-up energies accumulated over years of systematic humiliation and injustice will, once released, be a force that no power will ever be able to resist.

The struggle for the independence of Mauritius was greatly inspired by the actions of the political stalwarts of India, with whom the Father of our Nation entertained close relations.

Excellency,

Shrimati Indira Gandhi described Mauritius a “great little country” even when we were just emerging from colonial rule, struggling to overcome our inherent vulnerabilities and to spur economic growth. This was, no doubt, the vision of a grand lady, who recognised the same indomitable spirit in the people of Mauritius as in the people of India.

India, Excellency, has always stood by Mauritius in its trials and tribulations. And we have always been comforted by the words of your successive leaders that India will never do anything to hurt the interests of Mauritius.

India has always been committed to upholding the security and the sovereignty of Mauritius for which we are highly appreciative.

I recently had the opportunity to recall how during my State Visit to India in 2005, the Government of India responded so spontaneously to our request for assistance to enable Mauritius to build-up its maritime security capacities.

Only a few days ago I launched a state-of-the-art coastal surveillance system.

Indeed, India continues to play a key role in strengthening our security and in helping us to combat piracy. Since April 2009, with the assistance of the Indian Navy, a marine commando force comprising 21 commandos has been set up to combat piracy in the high seas.

Simultaneously, the Indian Government has been deploying on a six-monthly basis, Indian naval ships to Mauritius for the joint surveillance of our Exclusive Economic Zone with a view to combating piracy, illegal fishing and to reinforce maritime security in the region.

Indian naval vessels have conducted several hydrographic surveys for Mauritius free of charge, thereby enabling us to revise our antiquated nautical charts and to create new ones.

The production of these bathymetric charts proved vital for the preparation of our submission to the United Nations for the extension of our Continental Shelf. This

submission has now been unanimously approved by the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental shelf.

India and Mauritius have a shared interest in the stability of the Indian Ocean and I am confident that we shall continue to work together in responding to security threats at sea and ensuring the safety of our sea lanes, the arteries of our trade with the outside world.

Excellency,

I could give many more examples of India's contribution to the advancement of Mauritius, in particular, in the field of infrastructure and human capital. Everybody recognises India's footprints on all the facets of our economic, social and cultural development.

We welcome the assistance of India to Mauritius and we would wish to see a still stronger engagement of India in various sectors. We are therefore gratified that your delegation comprises prominent private sector actors from various fields and we hope that their visit will enable them to concretely chart out investment opportunities in Mauritius and to explore new avenues of economic cooperation.

I am confident that the business community will find Mauritius not only an ideal investment destination but also a unique business platform linking Asia and Africa.

The visa facilities we have extended to the people of India should ease travel and facilitate the development of business opportunities.

In the hotel and tourism sector, investments and tourist arrivals from India are on the rise. We believe there is room for greater growth and development in these sectors

and look forward to Mauritian and Indian entrepreneurs exploring together innovative forms of tourism such as Ayurvedic healing or spiritual re-sourcing.

Excellency,

The association of India with scientific and technological progress and research is world-recognised. India has always used science and technology as tools for development. From Aryabhata to Ramanujan, Indian expertise has fired the minds of many a mathematician and scientist. We trust that we can also benefit from this scientific and technological legacy of India.

Our wish is to see the development of the medical and knowledge hubs, including research in Mauritius, take place with the support of leading Indian institutions. In this context, we are delighted that the Indian Institute of Technology is poised to come to Mauritius. We look forward to more institutions of repute setting up in our island.

We know that India is already embarked on developing its energy potential and on the creation of green buildings. This is an area where greater collaboration can be foreseen especially following the recent meeting of the Mauritius-India joint working group on renewable energy in March of this year.

We would also like to see India as a strategic partner in regional projects and in this context, I note with satisfaction the reinforcement of the SADC-India relationship.

We are also confident that the India-Africa Forum will bring a new dimension to the multifaceted links between Africa and India.

Excellency,

India has always been the voice of the voiceless ! Small Island Developing States like Mauritius look up to India's relentless pursuit of a more sustainable and inclusive development in the world.

In this respect, we have always been a staunch proponent of the urgent reform of the international governance system which clearly has outlived its purpose. We need to re-engineer international institutions to make them resonate with contemporary realities so that they can respond more effectively to the increasingly complex challenges of our time.

The early support of Mauritius for India's bid to a permanent seat in the Security Council and our excellent working relations in different international fora are rooted in our recognition of India as a staunch ally.

The prominence of India today on the global stage may have surprised many. This is not so for those, who like us in Mauritius, know and fully appreciate the depth of this great country's history ! India's vision of the world is enshrined in the immortal expression *Vasudevam Kutumbakham*: the world is one family. And to us who admire the innovative nature and creative capacity of the Indian people, the recognition of India as a global power was but a question of time.

We are therefore pleased by India's increased affirmation on the international scene. We congratulate India for its constructive role as a non-permanent-Member of the UN Security Council for the period 2011-2012. Let me also reiterate the unflinching support of Mauritius to India for a permanent seat in an enlarged UN Security Council.

India walking away with the world cricket cup a few weeks ago was highly symbolical of the triumph of India as a powerful nation. I understand, Excellency, that you witnessed the winning match in person. Let me renew my congratulations to you and through you, to the people of India on this historical feat.

You may be aware that we in Mauritius, did not inherit cricket as part of the British legacy. However, thanks to the initiative of the Indian High Commission, other diplomatic representations and some zealous cricket fans and businessmen in Mauritius, soon we will have a modern cricket stadium.

Your Excellency,

We are confident that as India moves ahead and becomes a much coveted power, it will continue to cherish its relations with Mauritius and to uphold our development in the knowledge that our ties go beyond mere State to State relations or common commercial interests.

These ties nurtured by renewed understanding, trust and mutual support, will continue to evolve and flourish.

Madam President,

Your visit comes at an opportune time in the relations between our two countries. It demonstrates once more the strong will from both our countries to consolidate our partnerships and gives us the opportunity to review our collaboration and further discuss issues of mutual interest.

Excellency,

I wish you and members of your delegation a pleasant stay in our country. Your visit to our country will no doubt take our relationship to a still higher stratum.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I invite you to join me, in a toast to:-

- The health and well-being of Her Excellency, the President of the Republic of India;**
- The happiness and prosperity of the people of India; and**
- To the abiding friendship between Mauritius and India.**

Jai Hind! Jai Mauritius!

I thank you for your attention.
